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YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP ACADEMY IS NO BAND CAMP:

Three-day event is more like boot camp for would-be entrepreneurs

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Discussions of entrepreneurship, business and finance may seem out of place and, frankly, of little interest to most teenagers during the dog days of summer.

But then there are young people like Ohan Arakelian, CEO of the Dons Net Cafe, an actual youth-run enterprise, and one of a dozen Santa Barbara High School students learning the finer points of running a business when some of their peers are winding down their summer vacations.

For Ohan and his fellow students, running a business is not a hobby or something just for adults.

To indulge his appetite for entrepreneurship, he and his student-colleagues are taking part in a three-day Youth Entrepreneurship and Leadership Academy, which wraps up Wednesday at Santa Barbara City College. The program, which is a year-long affair connecting high school and college students to real-world business professionals, is funded by a \$60,000 grant from the Small Business Development Center for Santa Barbara County. The program aims to instruct 120 young entrepreneurs between the ages of 14 and 27.

This week, SBDC brought in award-winning E-Entrepreneurs Jacques Habra and Lorrie Thomas, who taught business concepts and practices using the latest Web-based marketing techniques, such as the finer points of search engine optimization.

"We're thrilled to have this opportunity to learn from experts," said Ohan, who will be a senior this fall at SBHS. "They're giving back so much to us. It's a real privilege." He said he liked the visual, hands-on examples imparted by the instructors, and was confident he and the other students



would apply some of the techniques to the Dons Net Cafe, which runs a recycling service, sells coffee beans and offers a free tax-assistance program.

"Increasingly, this is marketing that matters," said Ohan, of the online approaches to selling products and services.

"These kids are amazing," added Ms. Thomas, who describes her work as being a "Web marketing therapist." She said the students were writing business plans, position statements and learning how to use the Web as a powerful marketing tool.

"It's like three days of drinking from a firehose," said Ms. Thomas, talking about the intensity and volume of information being offered. "Programs like these are giving them a foundation to succeed in future ventures."

According to SBDC director Becki Walker, the grant will fund the hiring of 14 business consultants to give students a real-world perspective that complements their educations. "These aren't just lectures," she said of the Youth Entrepreneurship and Leadership Academy programs. "A great

Jacques Habra, a speaker at the Youth Entrepreneurship Academy at SBCC, instructs business students on how the cost of fuel affects their bottom lines.

STEVE MALONE/NEWS-PRESS

many young people are very interested in having their own businesses. We view this as a wonderful opportunity to introduce a variety of small business ownership elements.

"Who knows? We may be incubating a future Internet millionaire," she said of the original business ideas simmering in the brains of some of the young people.

Whatever product or service they end up developing, Ohan Arakelian said the students have made it a goal to emphasize ethics and economics — they call it "ethonomics" — and work on projects with an eye to bettering the planet.

However, good ol' networking also helps, and the earlier the better. To that end, the fledgling business people are all members of the Santa Barbara Chamber of Commerce.

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